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Limitations on Community Participation in Planning Decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia: A Review of Recent Studies

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Abstract: Community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia is fundamental for achieving sustainable development by deliberating on the present and future interests of the community. The provision for the community to participate in both the strategic and operational planning is stated in the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172). Community participation in the planning process helps decision-makers to make better decisions by incorporating the community's experiential knowledge into the process. Furthermore, it is meant to promote greater citizenship and to democratise governance through the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Nevertheless, the current state of community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia indicates shortcomings, hence impeding the effort to achieve its primary purpose. This paper attempts to explore the lack of community participation based on its current state. The inadequacies of the conventional participatory process employed by local planning authorities in Peninsular Malaysia are elucidated by reviewing previous studies conducted by Malaysian scholars. The issues that transpire from the literature review are sorted into operational, structural, and cultural aspects. This study concludes that the current community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia points to the ineffectiveness of the process, thus hindering the ability of the community to access a genuine participation avenue.

1. INTRODUCTION

The local government is responsible for providing quality living to its community, as well as being accountable for its decisions ([Kuppusamy, 2008](#); [Abdullah, M. C., 2008](#)). However, urbanisation has posed the local authorities of major cities in Peninsular Malaysia with enormous challenges in accommodating the higher demand for basic amenities and affordable housing ([Razak, Johar, & Abd Khalil, 2016](#); [Ngah, K. et al., 2011](#)). In addition, the local authority cum local planning authority (LPA) needs to provide more opportunities for the community to participate in planning decision-making ([Berman, 2011](#)). Community participation is fundamental in helping the decision-makers to determine the best planning alternative available through the incorporation of the community's experiential knowledge into the

decision-making ([Innes & Booher, 2004](#)). Furthermore, community participation represents an effort to democratise the planning decision-making with the interest of multiple stakeholders being inclusively addressed and considered, hence resolving conflicts ([Healey, 1997](#); [Innes & Booher, 2004](#)).

Urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia is governed by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) as the primary legal instrument legislative framework ([Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)). The role of the LPA is delineated in Act 172 under Section 5 (1) and 6 (1). Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests the inability of LPAs in Peninsular Malaysia to fulfil this role effectively. It is associated with the lack of capacity among the LPAs, together with intervention by upper-tier planning authorities ([Maidin & Ali, 2009](#)). The centralisation of the government system, including urban planning, has led the urban planning to focus more on national rather than local interest ([Arnstein, 1969](#); [Newman et al., 2004](#)). Therefore, the extent to which community participation is able to provide a genuine opportunity for the community to incorporate their interests in planning decisions is questionable.

Community participation in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia (except Kuala Lumpur) is guided by Act 172 ([Omar & Leh, 2009](#)). Community participation is essential to achieve a sustainable and quality living environment by incorporating the present and future interests of the community ([Dola & Mohd Noor, 2012](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#)).

This study focuses on the literature search and review as the method for data collection and analysis. Initially, several key literature works were identified using the literature search engines of Mendeley and Google Scholar. Subsequently, the identified literature works were thematically analysed and sorted into three main themes — operational, structural, and cultural. This method allowed the researcher to derive the issues most highlighted by scholars concerning community participation in planning decision-making.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the lack of community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia. The shortcomings of the conventional participatory process adopted by the LPAs in Peninsular Malaysia are elucidated by reviewing previous studies by Malaysian scholars. This study concludes that the current community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia suffers from the ineffectiveness of the process, thus impeding the ability of the community to access a genuine participation avenue.

2. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING DECISION-MAKING

Community participation in the public process has regularly caused dilemmas to the government as the decision-maker, thus leading to the ambivalence of community participation in the decision-making ([Maginn, 2007](#); [Foley & Martin, 2000](#)). [Maginn \(2007\)](#) underlined the potential costs attributed to the participatory process as one of the main reasons behind the inconsistency of community involvement in decision-making. This is possible if the decision involves large-scale developments or radical partisan, leading to a conflict of interest between government, community, and interested stakeholders. [Arnstein \(1969\)](#) described the participatory process as a ladder that benefits a particular stakeholder or community segment that holds more

considerable influence, thus excluding the less-influenced segment from the process.

Conceptually, community participation in planning helps the decision-makers to make better decisions by incorporating the community's experiential knowledge into the process ([Innes & Booher, 2004](#); [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\), 2017](#)). Furthermore, community participation promotes the democratisation of the planning decision by inclusively addressing and considering the interests of community segments and stakeholders, thus resolving conflicts ([Healey, 1997](#); [Innes & Booher, 2004](#)).

Although participation is the right thing to include, its genuineness has been argued by many. The argument is based on reality; the decision made is often influenced by the dominant stakeholder rather than the commoner, which has resulted in self-interest overshadowing collective interest ([Innes & Booher, 2004](#)). Moreover, [Newman et al. \(2004\)](#) believe that the local government faces a losing game when it comes to prioritising between national priorities and local interests. Consequently, meaningless participation is offered to the community. As illustrated by [Arnstein \(1969\)](#), the participatory process without decentralising the power to decide is meaningless, hence benefiting a particular segment and maintaining the status quo. [Newman et al. \(2004\)](#) further argued that the level of participation possessed by the community in the public process has yet to reach a level where they can influence the operational decision of the government.

Thus, questions regarding the criteria for effective public participation have been raised. This issue was highlighted by [Brown and Chin \(2013\)](#) in their study that evaluated the effectiveness of public participation. By reviewing several literature works, themes that represent the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of public participation emerged ([Brown & Chin, 2013](#)). These criteria are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria for Effective Public Participation

Criteria	Description
Representation	Public participants should include the representative of the affected population
Independence	Participation process should be equitable
Early involvement	The public should be involved in the most initial stage of the process
Transparency	The process should be transparent particularly during the decision-making
Resource accessibility	Public participation should have access to the appropriate resources to ensure the success of its implementation
Seeking out and involving those affected by decisions	Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by the decision
Comfort and convenience	The timing and place of meetings should be convenient to the participants' schedule
Deliberative quality	All participants should be given a chance to speak and give opinions
Level of conflict	Participation process should avoid conflict
Seek input from participants in how they participate	Participants' input is sought to design the participation process
Task definition	Nature and scope of the participants should be well-defined
Non-technical information	The information provided to participants must be easily understood and use minimal technical language

Communicates influence on a decision	Participants should be enlightened about how their input affected the decision
Outcome criteria influence	The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy
Increased understanding	Public participation should build mutual understanding between stakeholders
Consensus reached	Decisions made are based on consensus and mutual understanding
Increased trust	Public participation should build trust
Workable solutions	Public participation should create an acceptable solution
Satisfaction	Public participation should bring satisfaction to participants

3. OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

3.1 The urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia

Urban planning concerns planning and regulating the land use, spatial development, improving the living quality, generating economic growth, and at the same time managing the resources and environment to achieve sustainability in development ([UN-Habitat, 2016](#)).

Urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia (except Kuala Lumpur) is governed by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) as the primary legislative instrument ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)). It is divided into four tiers of planning authorities — federal, regional, state, and local level.

In general, the intergovernmental relationship between these planning authorities is centralised. This is demonstrated by the translation of national development strategy into sub-tier development planning. The National Physical Planning Council (NPPC) is responsible for advising both the federal and state governments on the national physical development. Furthermore, the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning is responsible for formulating the direction and policy of future development planning which later is translated by the state and local governments at the individual level ([Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)).

Meanwhile, the State Planning Committee (SPC) is responsible for advising the state government on matters that relate to land development activities in the state. The SPC performs these functions within the framework of the national development policy ([Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)). Also, Section 6A of Act 172 provides for the establishment of a regional planning committee (RPC) as the planning authority for a region. The RPC is responsible for advising both the state and local planning authorities in the region ([Maidin, 2011](#)). However, the efficacy of both SPC and RPC in advising planning at the local level is debatable due to the absence of local actors in these authorities.

Legislatively, the role of the local planning authority (LPA) has been delineated by Act 172 under Section 5(1) and 6(1) which is to govern the urban planning including public transportation and public amenities.

However, empirical evidence suggests that the role of the LPAs is hindered by the lack of capacity among the majority of LPAs in Peninsular Malaysia ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#)). This is associated with the requirement for the LPAs to perform their functions within the exclusive control of the state government (State List of Federal Constitution 1957), thus leading to interferences by SPC

in urban planning. Moreover, the LPAs' dependency on federal grants has amplified the interventions ([Maidin & Ali, 2009](#)).

Urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia is based on the relationship between strategic planning and operational planning. According to Section 22 (2) (a) of Act 172, LPAs are required to refer to the gazetted Local Plan (LP) in granting planning permission. This is imperative for a proposed development to conform to the LP ([Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)). For that reason, this study focuses on both strategic and operational planning decisions to analyse community participation in both processes.

The urban planning framework is divided into a three-tier government plan with the national development strategies (Malaysia Plan, National Physical Plan, and Sectoral Plan) steering the direction of the lower-tier development planning, referred to as the State Structure Plan (SSP), Local Plan (LP), and Special Area Plan (SAP) ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)). Accordingly, the development strategy at the local level must be aligned with the National Physical Plan and State Structure Plan, hence constructively defining the centralisation of the urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia.

3.2 The impact of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) amendments on community participation

Constitutionally, urban planning in Malaysia has been allocated under the ninth schedule of the Federal Constitution 1957 which underlines the authority of both federal and state governments in urban planning in the country, apart from in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, along with Sabah and Sarawak (Federal Constitution 1957). As a result, the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) has been enacted as a framework to ensure uniformity of law and implementation of urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia, as stated in the constitution under Sections 74 (1), 76 (4), and 80 (2). The main purpose of Act 172 is to provide a legislative framework for governing land developments through the allocation of authorities across federal, state, and local levels.

Chronologically, Act 172 has been amended five times: in 1993 (Act A866); 1995 (Act A933); 2001 (Act A1129); 2007 (Act A1313), and 2017 (Act A1522). The purpose of these amendments has been to address the need for a better urban planning system, thus eradicating the issues initiated by rapid urbanisation such as affordable housing and urban poverty ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#)). The urbanisation phenomenon has increased the pressure for greater community wellbeing that promotes a sustainable and liveable living environment through better planning decision-making. In this study, the elaboration of the amendments of Act 172 only emphasises on Act A1129 and Act A1522, following the purpose of both amendments, which focuses on the reformation of the urban planning system and the intergovernmental relationship between multi-tier planning authorities (Figure 1).

Act A1129 and Act A1522 have seen the urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia increasingly centralised, thus reducing the autonomy of LPAs in making their planning decisions ([Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Consequently, the decisions made might not represent the interest of the local population. The planning authorities at the federal and state level tend to disregard the importance of community engagement, hence impeding the incorporation of community interest in the decision ([Maidin, 2011](#)). In

other words, it has left the LPAs in an almost no-win situation, hence offering meaningless participation to the community.

Moreover, both amendments have influenced the capability of LPAs to inclusively offer the stakeholders with the opportunity to participate. The centralisation of the urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia has affected the extensiveness of the participatory process due to the limitations of resources, time, and means ([Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#)).

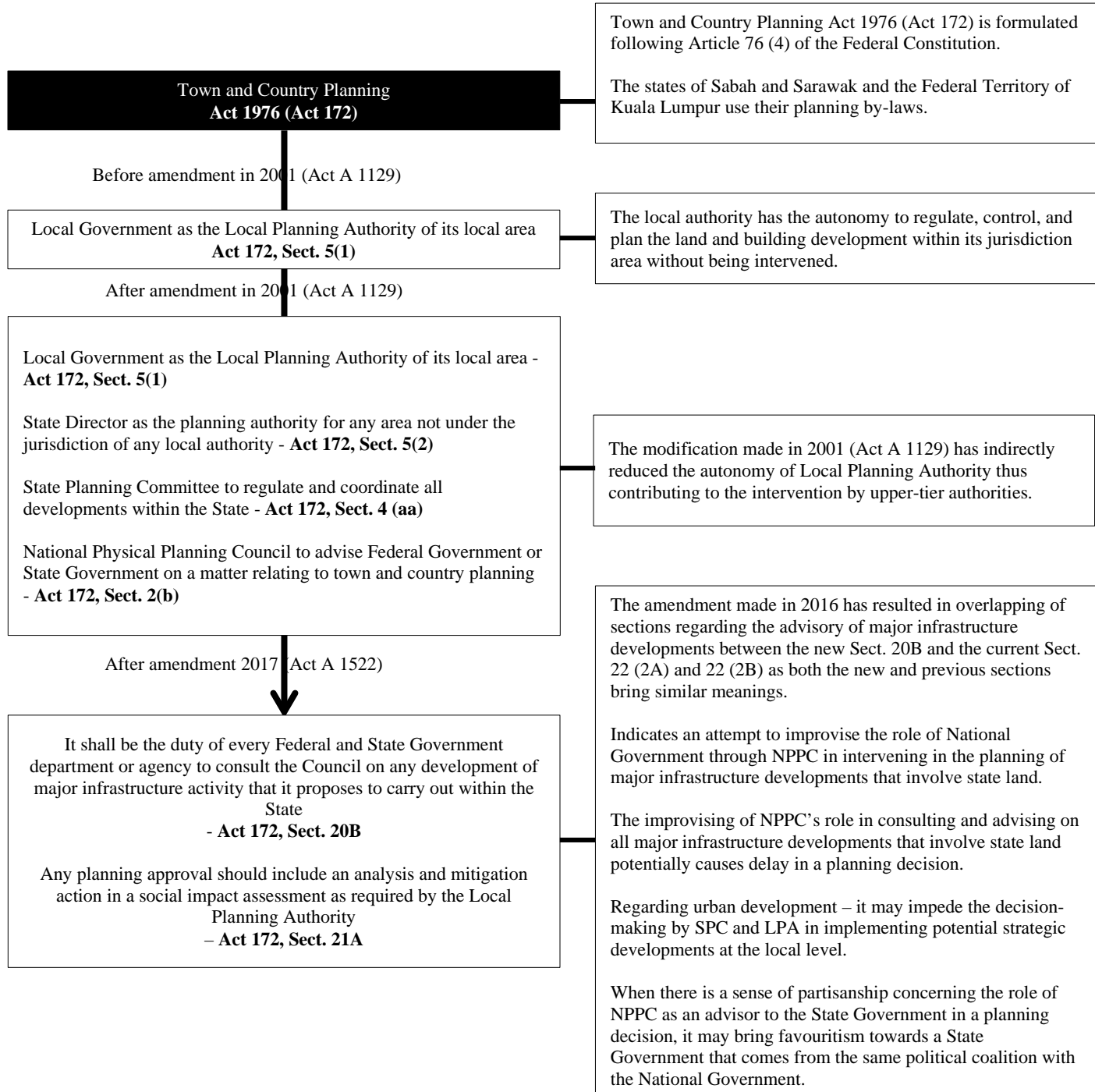


Figure 1: History of Amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172)

4. THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATORY PROCESS IN PLANNING DECISION-MAKING IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

Conceptually, community participation in planning decisions provides a clear picture to the decision-maker regarding public preferences, hence leading to a better choice made through the incorporation of the community's experiential knowledge into the process ([Innes & Booher, 2004](#); [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\), 2017](#)). Furthermore, the main objective of community participation is to democratise the planning decision-making to address the interest of all stakeholders inclusively, thus resolving conflicts ([Healey, 1997](#); [Innes & Booher, 2004](#); [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\), 2017](#)).

This section elaborates on the current state of community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia.

4.1 Community participation in strategic planning

As one of the urban planning mechanisms, the development plan has the main objective of guiding the direction of future land developments in Peninsular Malaysia. To produce a sustainable development plan, the community should be enabled to participate in the process ([Abdullah, A. A., Harun, & Abdul Rahman, 2011](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#)). The participatory process in the development planning is underscored in several sections of Act 172.

Section 9 of Act 172 underlines the publicity process as the main avenue for the community to participate in the SSP. There are two phases of publicities — in the first phase, community and other stakeholders are informed of the main findings of the assessment report, and in the second phase, the SPC presents the proposed development's direction and strategy to the public. In reality, it can be perceived that the provision for the community to be involved in the process is limited to after the assessment report and a draft plan have been prepared. The community is not involved during the data collection and proposal stages, which indicates the possibility of a dearth of community experiential knowledge in the proposal.

In addition, the validity of the data gathered by the LPAs is questionable as the community is not well-informed of the entire process. The method for information sharing outlined in Section 9 (2) of Act 172 is also less adaptive to the diversity of stakeholders, thus leading to the marginalisation of certain segments from participating in the planning decision-making.

Furthermore, the element of participation and incorporation of community interest is highlighted in Section 10(3) (a) of Act 172. In approving the draft SSP, the SPC has to consider any objection that it has received. Following the objection, the objector is eligible to attend and justify his/her concerns to the public hearing committee.

However, the SPC is not obliged to incorporate the objections received into their decision. Instead, the SPC is required to translate the national development strategy, hence impeding the effort for a "bottom-up" approach in planning decision-making ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#)). Similar practices are employed in evaluating the implementation of the SSP.

In the context of the LP, Section 12A of Act 172 underlines the LPAs' obligation to promote community engagement in preparing the draft LP. Legislatively, community and other stakeholders are invited, using

conventional methods such as local newspaper, banner, and radio broadcast, to attend a publicity programme. The community is eligible to submit their objection or proposal concerning the drafted LP that has been exhibited during the publicity programme. Similar to the SSP, objections and proposals received are to be brought to a public hearing.

The community is entitled to participate before the preparation of the preliminary report and also after the preparation of the draft LP. Nevertheless, community participation is absent during the proposal stage, thus raising concerns about the soundness of the proposal in addressing community interests. The validity of the collected data is also debatable since the operating method of engagement used is conventional. In principle, LPAs might use an additional method to engage with the community in ensuring greater participation. However, legislatively, the medium for information sharing and engagement seems limited. It has marginalised some community segments from the planning process and its benefits.

Section 14 (1) of Act 172 provides for the establishment of a public hearing committee by the SPC. The function of this committee is to organise a hearing session that allows the objector or their representative to justify their concerns, which will help the SPC in making its planning decisions. It is an opportunity for the community to express their concerns. Nevertheless, the community has no access to the outcome of the public hearing. Therefore, the extent to which the community is able to influence the strategic planning decisions remains uncertain.

Furthermore, the SPC will take into consideration any relevant matters, particularly those concerning the conformity of the LP to the SSP. The LP will take precedence over the SSP only when the SPC is satisfied that the differences between both plans are caused by the out-datedness of the SSP. In other words, there is a clear indication that the state government's interest holds a more significant influence on the way a decision is made.

4.2 Community participation in operational planning

According to Act 172, the community is eligible to participate in the planning control in the absence of an LP ([Maidin, 2011](#)) Town and Country Planning Act 1976). Subsequently, Section 21 (6) of Act 172 states the requirement for the LPA to notify the neighbouring landowner regarding the planning permission. Subsequently, the adjacent landowner has the right to make any objection to the application within the stipulated time. Later, both the applicant and the objector will be invited to attend a hearing where both parties will be allowed to justify their stand.

The current state of urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia suggests that most of the urban areas have their LP, thus preventing the possibility that the community engagement will take place at the earliest stage of the operational planning. In other words, operational planning is merely a two-way communication between the LPA and applicant without involving those who might be affected by the proposed development.

The absence of community participation, predominantly during the pre-consultation and decision-making stages, might lead to favouritism in granting the planning permission. Furthermore, planning permission as the operational decision of the LPA is a commitment between the LPA and applicant, which may require compensation to be made if the decision is to be revoked ([Faludi, 1987](#)). Therefore, greater community involvement in the planning permission may lead to better deliberation of the planning decision, hence preventing further disputes.

Additionally, from Section 22 and Subsection 22 (2A) on “Treatment of application”, it is understood that the LPA will deliberate any objection in granting planning permission. However, in the absence of a notification produced to the neighbouring landowner, it is doubtful whether this avenue would be available ([Maidin, 2011](#)). Furthermore, in the case of state-interest developments involving the SPC as the decision-maker and requiring NPC’s advice, it has left the LPAs in an almost no-win situation, thus offering meaningless participation to the community ([Newman et al., 2004](#)). Planning practices with a top-down approach have resulted in the planning decision to focus more on national rather than local interest ([Arnstein, 1969](#); [Newman et al., 2004](#)).

The community is also allowed to appeal against any planning permission that has been granted by the LPA within one month. It can be made through the appeal board, as stated in Section 23 (1) of Act 172. Nevertheless, only those who have submitted an objection as elaborated under Section 21 (6) are eligible to appeal. In other words, the opportunity for the community to influence the planning decision is potentially impeded from the first stage of the planning permission.

5. METHOD OF THE STUDY

This study employs a literature search and thematic analysis as the method for collecting and analysing the data to achieve the objective of the study and to explore the shortcomings of the current participatory process in Peninsular Malaysia by reviewing recent studies by Malaysian scholars. Recent studies in this paper refer to the scholarly works produced by Malaysian scholars during a ten-year period (2008–2018). Mendeley and Google Scholar were used to identify the key literature works with terms such as “participation”, “planning”, and “Malaysia”. Subsequently, only the studies focusing on participation in decision-making in the context of urban planning were selected. A total of 13 literature works were identified, including one study by [Dola and Mijan \(2006\)](#), which the author believes could provide an important argument to the study.

These literature works were thematically analysed, and the data considered relevant to the purpose of this study were coded. The codes refer to the arguments deliberated by the scholars on the limited community participation in current planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia. All the codes were organised into different themes (shortcomings). A table was used to display the relationship between themes and codes based on three aspects — operational, structural and cultural — as adapted from [Mustapha, Azman, and Ibrahim \(2013\)](#) and [Tosun \(2000\)](#) in evaluating the effectiveness of community participation in planning decision-making.

Following the analysis, 12 themes (shortcomings) were identified and presented according to the scholars. Subsequently, the most highlighted issue concerning community participation in planning decision-making was derived from the table (see Table 2).

6. LIMITATIONS ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING DECISION-MAKING

Twelve types of issues transpired from the thematic analysis of previous studies by Malaysian scholars. These findings highlight the paucity of the conventional participatory process currently employed by the LPAs in Peninsular Malaysia. These issues are organised into operational, structural, and cultural categories adapted from [Mustapha, Azman, and Ibrahim \(2013\)](#) and [Tosun \(2000\)](#).

6.1 Operational Category

From the operational perspective, the issues concerning community participation in Peninsular Malaysia are associated with the centralisation of the urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia. Planning decisions are made in the “top-down” manner ([Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Legislatively, the direction of developments in Malaysia is delineated at the federal level and later translated at both state and local levels in the form of SSP and LP ([Berman, 2011](#)). The centralisation of the urban planning system thus indicates the autonomy of the NPPC in dictating urban planning at the lower-tier levels ([Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Consequently, this has limited the capacity of LPAs to effectively plan and regulate the local development planning and reduced the capability of the community to genuinely participate in the process. According to [Maidin \(2011\)](#), the planning authorities at federal and state levels tend to disregard the importance of community engagement, thus impeding the incorporation of the community agenda in the planning decision.

Scholars have also identified the existence of unequal access to information and participation platforms among the community segments ([bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Ngah, I. & Zulkifli, 2014](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). This issue has led to the marginalisation of some segments, predominantly the low-income households, from participating effectively. As mentioned by [Mustapha, Azman, and Ibrahim \(2013\)](#) and [bin Yaakob \(2012\)](#), the lack of access to information has affected community participation in development planning. In the context of planning control, the eligibility of the adjoining neighbour to participate has affected the interest of other stakeholders that could be impacted by the planning permission ([Maidin, 2011](#)). The manner of information sharing via publicity and development plans also contributes to the shortcomings in community participation. The technicality of the development plans coupled with the lack of detailed information presented to the public has indirectly restricted some segments from engaging effectively in the process ([Maidin, 2011](#); [bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)).

Another operational issue identified in current practices is the lack of collaboration and coordination among multiple stakeholders that has led to favouritism in the planning decision, thus benefiting certain stakeholders ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Halim, Salleh, & Omar, 2011](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). The absence of collaboration and coordination among stakeholders is attributed to the “mind your own business” (MYOB) syndrome among the urban community ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)). Likewise, the existence of the knowledge gap among the stakeholders also impedes collaboration. Several stakeholders, such as civil

society and the private sector, have greater knowledge and awareness of the public process ([bin Yaakob, 2012](#)).

6.2 Structural Category

Six of the limitations on community participation fall within the structural aspect category. The first limitation relates to the administration and financial capacity of LPAs in managing the development planning including the participatory process ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)). Consequently, it has restrained the capability of LPAs in organising various participatory platforms, hence affecting their ability to be responsive to community interest. The time and means limitations affect the extensiveness of the participatory process in promoting greater community participation ([Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#)).

The incompetence and attitude of public officials was highlighted as one of the main issues that needed to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of the participatory process. This structural issue is linked with the lack of skilled public planners in facilitating the process of development planning, including during the publicity stage that has led to the delay in completing strategic plans. Scholars also agreed the present development plan is insufficient in representing future demands ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). Moreover, [Chua and Deguchi \(2008\)](#) emphasised the delay in gazetting both the SSP and LP.

Also, the commitment of LPAs in engaging with the community is debatable. It seems the LPAs are reluctant to collaborate with the community, particularly those with a low education level ([Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Therefore, it is plausible that the majority of the LPAs favour the conventional participation method ([Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#)).

In addition, the finding indicates that the domination of certain stakeholders in decision-making has influenced the genuineness of the participatory process ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#)). The influence of the private sector in planning decision-making is associated with globalisation ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#)). Globalisation has seen the Malaysian government introducing the public-private partnership (PPP) model. Subsequently, this has increased the influence of the private sector in the public process ([Dola & Mohd Noor, 2012](#)). The existence of elitism in decision-making has benefitted high-income households and the majority of the urban community. It is in line with the argument by [Ngah, I. and Zulkifli \(2014\)](#) that those who are active in community organisations tend to take part in the participatory process. Low-income households and rural communities have limited capacity, thus being marginalised from participating in the planning process ([Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Therefore, the influence gap among stakeholders has affected the capability of some community segments to gain control in managing their wellbeing, thus impeding the effort to achieve inclusive and genuine participation in planning decision-making.

Previous studies also highlight the legal aspect as one of the shortcomings that need to be attended to in promoting genuine participation avenues to all community segments. The present legislative framework does not define public participation nor warrants the statutory right for the community to participate in planning decision-making ([Maidin, 2011](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Even though there is a provision for public participation in Act 172, this does not clearly specify the manner of engaging and managing

public opinions in making a decision ([Maidin, 2011](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). Consequently, the inadequacy of the legislative framework has affected the ability of both public officials and the community to understand the operation of the participatory process, including their role in the process. Moreover, it appears that the conventional participatory process employed by LPAs in Peninsular Malaysia is mere tokenism. As a result, the community becomes sceptical of the planning decisions made by the LPAs ([Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#)). The issue of accountability to the community is possibly related to the lack of transparency between the government and community. The community has been left pondering on how a planning decision is made; it is ambiguous how the community's opinions are incorporated into decision-making ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). The community also believes that the local authority makes decisions secretly without consulting them, thus influencing the perception of the community on the substance of the participatory process ([Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#)).

The participation platform and method used in approaching the community is one of the key factors in accomplishing the success of community participation. The presence of multiple stakeholders in urban areas highlights the importance of using a flexible participatory method. It is suggested that most of the LPAs in Peninsular Malaysia prefer the conventional method, which hinders the accomplishment of inclusive and genuine participation ([bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). Regarding the interrelation between both planning mechanisms — development plan and planning control — in Peninsular Malaysia, it is imperative to enable the involvement of the community in the planning control. However, Act 172 clearly states that in the absence of an LP, the adjoining neighbour is accessible to such opportunity ([Maidin, 2011](#)). Consequently, it has led to a gap among community members in relation to the capability to participate in the operational decision, hence affecting those who are possibly impacted by the permitted development.

6.3 Cultural Category

The lack of awareness and knowledge among the community members has been identified as the main cultural issue that affects the capability of the community to participate in the planning process in Peninsular Malaysia ([Halim, Salleh, & Omar, 2011](#); [bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). Limited knowledge, particularly among marginalised groups, has hindered their capability to access the public process ([Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Moreover, the terminologies used in legal documents and development plans do not help the current situation, indirectly marginalising the community from getting involved ([Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Maidin, 2011](#)). Scholars have also linked the lack of awareness with the attitude of the community. The MYOB syndrome, which is commonly found among the urban population, has affected the coordination and collaboration among stakeholders ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)).

The other issues categorised under the cultural aspect are the lack of active civil society and community organisations, along with the representation of all stakeholders. It is suggested that civil society or community organisations play an important role in representing the community because most of them have greater knowledge and access to the public process ([bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Ngah, I. & Zulkifli, 2014](#)). However, the role of civil society in the

participatory process has not been implored in the current planning system ([Maidin, 2011](#)). It is fundamental for the civil society or community organisations to be empowered in the planning decision-making. The community is also concerned whether the local councillors who are directly appointed by the state government can adequately represent their interests. The manner of appointment of local councillors in Malaysia has opened the possibility of partisanship decision-making by the local authority ([Maidin, 2011](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)). There is a tendency for political agendas to overrule community agendas in decisions.

Table 2: Shortcomings of community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia

Category	Type of Issue	Ahmad et al. (2013)	Chua & Deguchi (2008)	Dola & Mijan (2006)	Dola & Noor (2012)	Halim et al. (2011)	Maidin (2011)	Manaf et al. (2016)	Marzuki & Hay (2013)	Mustapha et al. (2013)	Ngah & Zulkifli (2014)	Omar & Leh (2009)	Osman et al. (2010)	Yaakob (2012)
Operational	Centralization of planning system						•	•		•				
	Unequal access to the process and its information						•		•	•	•			•
	Lack of coordination and collaboration between stakeholders			•		•		•	•	•			•	•
Structural	Administration and financial capacity	•	•										•	
	Incompetency and attitude of public official	•	•					•	•	•		•	•	
	Domination and elitism of stakeholder			•	•					•	•			•
	Well-defined and adequate legislative framework		•				•	•	•	•				
	Absent of transparency and accountability			•			•		•	•		•	•	•
	Ineffective participatory method			•			•	•	•			•		•
Cultural	Lack of public awareness and knowledge		•	•		•	•	•	•	•				•
	Lack of efficacy by NGO or Community Organization						•			•	•			
	Representativeness of all stakeholders						•	•						

7. RESULTS

From the thematic analysis performed, it is understood that the majority of the scholars believe the limited community participation in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia is associated with the structural aspect of the process. Fifty per cent of the total number of 12 issues elucidated are under the structural category of the planning process (see Table 2). Seven of the total number of 13 literature works highlighted the incompetence and attitude of public planners towards community participation avenues, which have a significant negative influence on the effectiveness of the process. This has led to the unwillingness of the community to participate along with the marginalisation of certain segments from the process ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#); [Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)).

Likewise, the absence of transparency and accountability elements in the conventional participatory process has been linked with the tokenism of the process (53%). Scholars believe that the participatory process in Peninsular Malaysia is facing a confidence issue among the community members ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). The community is sceptical about the way planning decisions

are made as they believe that there is an element of secrecy by the decision-makers. Some of the scholars deliberated this issue *vis-à-vis* the domination of the private sector in planning decision-making as a result of globalisation and neo-economic policy by the Malaysian government ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Dola & Mohd Noor, 2012](#)).

Moreover, the rigidities of the current community participatory process have failed to address the diversity of urban stakeholders, thus impeding some community segments from genuinely participating in the decision-making process ([Maidin, 2011](#); [bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)).

The findings of the analysis also indicate the lack of collaboration among stakeholders and the lack of awareness and knowledge among community members as part of the causes for the limited community participation in Peninsular Malaysia (see Table 2). Each of the issues represents the operational and cultural aspect, respectively. Seven of the 13 literature works highlighted the lack of collaboration among multiple stakeholders, predominantly in the urban setting, which has led to planning decisions being made without consensus, hence benefiting certain stakeholders ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Halim, Salleh, & Omar, 2011](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#); [bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). This issue is related to the MYOB syndrome, which scholars believe has hampered any initiative for greater collaboration among community members ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)). Comparatively, the analysis undertaken shows that the limited knowledge among community members is the most mentioned issue in the selected literature (61% of the total of 13 literature works) (see Table 2). Scholars concurred that the limited knowledge would affect community awareness, hence reducing their capacity to participate effectively and influence the planning decision ([Halim, Salleh, & Omar, 2011](#); [bin Yaakob, 2012](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Finally, the least stated issues are concerning the role of local councillors in representing community interest at the local level ([Maidin, 2011](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)) and the capacity of the LPAs, both administratively and financially ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#)).

8. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the current state of the participatory process in Peninsular Malaysia requires improvement, mainly to its structural aspect. It is plausible to foresee that the improvement of the structural aspect of the community participatory process will imminently improve both the operational and cultural aspects. By mitigating the structural-related issues, it will provide an environment that facilitates greater knowledge and awareness acquisition among the community members, leading to a higher level of collaboration among the stakeholders.

The results of the analysis indicate that Malaysian scholars believe that the professionalism of public planners in handling the participatory process, including the incorporation of good governance, plays an important role in empowering the community in planning decision-making. The lack of skilled public planners to facilitate the community in participating in development planning has dampened the effort to genuinely incorporate the community's experiential knowledge in planning decisions ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#); [Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Osman, Rashid, & Ahmad, 2008](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)). Moreover, it seems that there is a lack of commitment among

the public planners to engage with the community, particularly the low-income segment ([Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). This is possibly associated with their perception of the community's understanding of urban planning.

The absence of transparency in the planning decision-making has also influenced the community's confidence towards the authenticity of the process. The current conventional approach adopted by the LPAs has led the community to believe that the local authorities are making decisions secretly without consulting them ([Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#)). Community members are uncertain whether their opinions are incorporated into decision-making ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Omar & Leh, 2009](#); [Marzuki & Hay, 2013](#)).

Therefore, both structural issues have led to a lack of collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, as well as the lack of awareness and knowledge among community members. Several operational and cultural issues are interrelated with the existence of a knowledge gap among stakeholders, which has hindered the potential of promoting collaboration among them ([bin Yaakob, 2012](#)). Substantively, the little knowledge of urban planning among the low-income segment and the technicality of the documents have hampered their capability to access the process ([Chua & Deguchi, 2008](#); [Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Maidin, 2011](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)). Moreover, scholars consider the absence of collaboration among stakeholders as related with the psychological factor of the "mind your own business" (MYOB) syndrome among the urban community ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016](#)). Consequently, the limited collaboration and coordination among the actors has led to favouritism in the planning decision, hence benefiting certain stakeholders ([Dola & Mijan, 2006](#); [Halim, Salleh, & Omar, 2011](#); [Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013](#)).

Retrospectively, public planners' attitude and prowess in managing the community participatory process is essential in offering genuine opportunities to all community segments. This factor will lead to the gradual enhancement of the community's awareness and knowledge concerning their role in making a better planning decision. Furthermore, being more transparent, especially during the decision-making, will ensure the community has greater confidence in the LPAs. These aspects will change the perception of the community towards the participatory process, hence empowering their capability to participate and influence the planning decision-making effectively.

9. CONCLUSION

This research participates in the continuous debate on the effectiveness of the community participatory process in urban planning as a vehicle for incorporating community interest into planning decisions, hence producing a greater living environment to the community. Thus, this study attempted to explore the possible shortcomings of the participatory process in planning decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia. Using thematic analysis, this study reviewed previous studies (13 literature works) that were conducted over a ten-year period (2008–2018) by Malaysian scholars to elucidate the issues raised.

Community participation in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia (except Kuala Lumpur) is framed within the framework of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) as the primary legislative instrument. Structurally, the urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia is based on a

top-down approach, especially concerning the translation of national development strategy to sub-tier development planning. The centralisation of the urban planning system in Peninsular Malaysia has limited the capacity of LPAs to offer a genuine avenue to the community to participate and influence planning decisions. The amendments of Act 172 (Act A1129 and Act A1522) have worsened the state of community participation. Scholars believe the LPAs are facing a losing game between prioritising the national and state interest and local interest. Subsequently, the current situation has made community participation merely a sugar-coated process. Moreover, the capability of LPAs to provide extensive participation platforms has also been affected due to the amendments.

This study derived shortcomings (12 themes) of the current practice in Peninsular Malaysia, which is based on a conventional participatory process. The current state of community participation highlights the inability of the current avenue to provide genuine participation to all community segments. The structural aspect emerged as the most notable shortcoming of the process. The majority of the scholars (seven of the total of 13 literature works) believe that the professionalism and skill of public planners, together with the transparency of the process could play an important part in enhancing the knowledge and awareness of the community, thus fostering greater collaboration and coordination among the stakeholders.

It is hoped that the findings of the study will help policymakers and decision-makers in addressing the shortcomings of the current practice, hence promoting genuine participation by the community.

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